

Branding > find the four C's

In building a business you will inevitably build a brand or nurture one that's already established. To succeed, managing your brand and the direction it takes is just as vital as managing costs and your people. This is a guide to some branding basics.

Branding – start with the basics

A healthy and strong brand will stand above the competition, standing more chance of being chosen if it's not been tried before, as well as having a loyal customer base once it's been purchased.

And that leads us to cows...

It all started with cows and making sure you could distinguish your cow from someone else's cow. That **clarity** led to the most basic form of branding with a unique stamp on your cow's rear end region. With most business being a little more complicated than cows nowadays, branding and brand management have become more sophisticated.

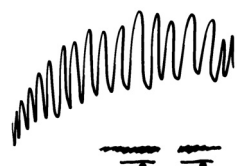
Even now this rather more basic cow example of branding is what people think it's all about – the name and the logo. It's not that simple, and lots of different inputs from all around your business will work together to make up your brand.

What is simple however is the benefit of a well managed, **consistently** thought through and strong brand. And that is the very catalyst behind the cow example above: Being unique, standing out and being identifiable.

That's because a strong healthy brand can:

- Act as a short-cut to what your brand is and how it's different from the competition
- Stand for a central promise – a brand positioning
- Become familiar and **credible**

People process information very quickly, and so you have to be **confident** to ensure your brand can cut through quickly, be understood, resonate and then become part of a consideration choice.



"All this information really backs up my visual identity 4 C's
Your visual identity has the power to give you an advantage...
Most of branding is visual identity – so look at it...
as your customers look at it – all the time!"

Brand positioning

People like to understand what they're buying into, and see if it fits their values and what they're about. It could be quality, cool, innovation, value, leadership, surprise, luxury, expertise – the list could go on and for any one brand incorporate an appropriate combination of these. That core brand promise and positioning sits at the heart of everything. It drives many different business decisions and activities including your marketing. It is something that needs careful thought, so it reflects your brand truthfully and as far as possible is different from your competition.

Think BMW aligning behind a premium driving experience, Nike making sportswear for winners and Disney uniting behind a goal to provide happiness and magic. Things wouldn't be quite so effective or memorably unique if they positioned themselves to make expensive cars, colourful footwear and somewhere to take the kids with a good line in mouse hats.

Similarly, confused thinking and lack of clarity can reflect in a confused customer. Imagine if Tesco wanted to state they were the leading supermarket in the country, the best. Let's also add in great service and low prices. But let's not forget it's an innovative supermarket too for good measure, and the fact that they're keen on the environment. Far easier to remember they want to do everything they can to help you with your shopping down to the tiniest little detail.

A **consistent** well looked after brand will have **clarity** and **credibility**, as well as something that customers have **confidence** to spend their money on.

What makes up your brand?

So if it's not just your name and logo what is it? A brand will be made up of a collection of different perceptions that will have been built up after exposure to every aspect of the brand. This can be a myriad of different things:

- Product design and experience
- Packaging
- Sales experience – your sales people or distributors
- Service experience – during the sale and after
- Advertising messages and strap lines
- The way you look and sound – imagery, colour, fonts, personality and tone
- Your website, blogs or mentions on social networking sites plus your advertising
- The price, and how you discount
- Your reputation
- The shop, office or factory experience
- Uniform, badges, vans and trucks
- Your people
- The logo
- Your name

Any one person could be exposed to all or just one of these variables, that when mixed together form the brand in their mind. There are many ways you will be able to influence what the brand means to people, so you can steer its direction. Left untouched and uncared for, without clear direction, your brand will take a course that will lead to less and less customers. Sometimes you just need **clarity** and some help setting the direction.

The challenge is making sure all of the things you can influence are working toward the same unique brand positioning that sets out what you stand for. All successful brands do this well, no matter if they are regional, national or global, the heart of the brand stays **consistent** and true.

It's essential you get this right. If you have marketing materials with different strap lines, changeable designs, copy that sounds different or doesn't match up to what you stand for, or products that don't match up to your brand promise then it's wasting the potential of your marketing investments. How do you expect customers to get a good idea of what you're about? How do you expect them to remember who you are if you're varying colours, image styles and fonts?

Take Apple as an example.

They tirelessly work towards creating innovative new products that work, that people will love because of the way they work and love because they are at the forefront of the latest technology.

So what do they do to back this up and support the positioning with customers? To be honest it would be quicker to list what they don't do, but here's a snap-shot.

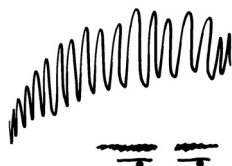
Their advertising, website and product brochures all fit together - you know it's Apple as soon as you see it. It's just relentless pursuit of their brand positioning.

Apple have got their brand positioning and direction totally clear, and then they execute everything to support it ruthlessly and **consistently**. Take one area of the business and fail to deliver, or do something a bit different and things start to unravel. It does take some planning, and some thought...

Is it really worth it?

For any business, large or small, they will need to create awareness of their brand and fight for space in that overloaded, message-addled brain of the customer. It's tempting to think that just because a business isn't as big or as complicated as Apple that the thinking behind the brand doesn't have to happen. Not so. There are just a few less things to manage. So no shock conclusion here, it's more than worth it, it's essential.

If you haven't got your brand pumping on all cylinders it might never stand a chance of ever being remembered, let alone considered. A core brand positioning that isn't unique and doesn't resonate with your target market, or a website that doesn't match to what you want to get across to the consumer all lacks **confidence**. Anything and everything you can do with the money you spend on marketing to remind the customer of your brand will help your investment work harder.



*I cannot take the credit for this article. I found it a long time ago, from where I can't remember — but I found it fascinating and kept it. So if the original author reads this then my apologies for reproducing without permission!

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